

P 161622Z MAR 99
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2259
INFO ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE
SECDEF WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 3645
USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 CAIRO 002104

LONDON FOR SUTPHIN, PARIS FOR LEAF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/11/09
TAGS: [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AT LOW EBB

REF: 98 CAIRO 8147

11. (U) CLASSIFIED BY ECONOMIC-POLITICAL MINISTER
COUNSELOR RICHARD LEBARON FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

12. (C) SINCE 1995, WHEN THE GOVERNMENT SHUT DOWN
PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES CONTROLLED BY THE MUSLIM
BROTHERHOOD AND ARRESTED THEIR ACTIVISTS, THE
BROTHERHOOD HAS REMAINED QUIET, ISSUING ONLY AN
OCCASIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES.
BUT THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT MOLLIFIED. IT EMBARKS ON
CAMPAIGNS OF ARRESTS OF MB MEMBERS, AND PUBLICIZES THE
ARRESTS, IN ORDER TO PREVENT AND DETER MB ACTIVISM IN
THE RUN-UP TO NATION-WIDE ELECTIONS. AFTER RELEASING
LAST YEAR A GROUP OF 31 MB ACTIVISTS FROM THE 1995
ROUND-UPS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ARRESTED ANOTHER 110
SINCE LAST AUGUST. THE ARRESTS WILL LIKELY CONTINUE AS
THE COUNTRY PREPARES FOR THE OCTOBER 1999 PRESIDENTIAL
REFERENDUM ON MUBARAK'S FOURTH TERM.

13. (C) THE MB IS FURTHER PLAGUED BY INTERNAL DIVISIONS
ALONG GENERATIONAL LINES, WITH THE YOUNGER ACTIVISTS
(THE TARGETS OF THE GOE ARRESTS) WANTING A GREATER ROLE
IN THE DECISION-MAKING, AND BY THE EGYPTIAN MB'S
WEAKENING TIES WITH SISTER ORGANIZATIONS IN OTHER ARAB
COUNTRIES. DESPITE THESE WEAKNESSES, THE MB REMAINS
EGYPT'S LARGEST AND BEST ORGANIZED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT.
OUR MB CONTACTS COMPLAIN OF THE SECURITY CRACKDOWNS,
DENY ANY LINKS WITH ISLAMIST TERROR GROUPS AND PROFESS
THEIR COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC POLICIES AND PRACTICES.
WE SHOULD HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ON THE LAST POINT. IN THE
MB IDEOLOGY, GOD'S LAW TRUMPS DEMOCRACY, AND GOD'S LAW
AS THEY INTERPRET IT DOES NOT FAVOR HERETICAL VIEWS,
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT, OR EQUAL RIGHTS
FOR NON-MUSLIMS IN AN ISLAMIC SOCIETY. END SUMMARY.

MB INTERNAL STRUCTURE

14. (C) ACCORDING TO EGYPTIAN EXPERTS ON THE MUSLIM
BROTHERHOOD, THE MB HAS TWO GOVERNING BODIES IN EGYPT.
THE "GUIDANCE BUREAU" OF 14 OFFICIALS RUNS DAY-TO-DAY
AFFAIRS. ITS CURRENT SUPREME GUIDE (MUSTAFA MASHOUR)
HAS TWO DEPUTIES: ONE (MA'MOUN AL-HODEIBY) SERVES AS
SPOKESMAN AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS,
WHILE THE OTHER (A SYRIAN NAMED HASAN HOWEIDY WHO HAS
LIVED IN EGYPT SINCE THE EARLY 1980'S) LIASES WITH MB
BRANCHES IN OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES. THE GUIDANCE BUREAU
INCLUDES THOSE IN CHARGE OF SYNDICATES, UNIVERSITIES,
FAMILIES, AND OTHERS IN CONTACT WITH THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY. THE MB'S LEADERSHIP IN EGYPT, WHERE THE
GROUP WAS FOUNDED IN 1927 AND FIRST BECAME POPULAR,
REMAINS IN THEORY ALSO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION, ALTHOUGH IN PRACTICE THE
BRANCHES ELSEWHERE HAVE BECOME DE FACTO INDEPENDENT.

MB CONTACTS HERE SAY THE OTHER BRANCHES HAVE BY NECESSITY EVOLVED SEPARATELY GIVEN THE DIFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES IN EACH COUNTRY. NEVERTHELESS, THE OTHERS "COORDINATE" WITH THE MOTHER ORGANIZATION IN CAIRO, AND AT THE TOP OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION THE SUPREME GUIDE IS ALWAYS AN EGYPTIAN. MB SOURCES HERE NOTE THAT MANY OF THE OTHER MB GROUPS OPERATE IN A FREER ENVIRONMENT, PARTICULARLY THE ONE IN JORDAN. THEY INCLUDE, IN ADDITION TO JORDANIAN AND SYRIAN MB, YEMEN'S ISLAH PARTY, PALESTINIAN HAMAS, AND ALGERIAN HAMAS AS MB AFFILIATES.

15. (C) THE OTHER GOVERNING BODY IS A "SHURA COUNCIL" OF 38 MEMBERS, WHICH MEETS PERIODICALLY TO REVIEW REPORTS FROM THE GUIDANCE BUREAU AND SETS OVERALL POLICY. IT INCLUDES A MINORITY OF NON-EGYPTIAN MEMBERS. IN THEORY IT ELECTS THE BUREAU OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE SUPREME GUIDE WHO COMES UP FOR ELECTION EVERY SIX YEARS. BUT IN PRACTICE, MUSTAFA MASHOUR WAS CHOSEN AS SUPREME GUIDE IN 1995 WITHOUT ELECTIONS. THE GUIDANCE BUREAU SELECTED MASHOUR BECAUSE, AT 74 YEARS OF AGE, HE WAS THE SENIOR MEMBER OF THE MB'S FOUNDING GENERATION, ACCORDING TO OUR MB SOURCES. THE MB IS SUPPOSED TO HOLD ELECTIONS FOR THE SHURA COUNCIL AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL (IN EGYPT) AND NATIONAL LEVEL (FOR THE OTHER ARAB BRANCHES), BUT MB MEMBERS HAVE TOLD US THAT IT HAS POSTPONED SHURA ELECTIONS IN EGYPT FOR SEVERAL YEARS BECAUSE OF GOVERNMENT SECURITY PRESSURE.

MB THEORY AND PRACTICE: NO ILLUSIONS

16. (C) THE MB PRESENTS ITSELF TO BOTH WESTERNERS AND EGYPTIANS AS COMMITTED TO DEMOCRACY, INCLUDING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS SUCH AS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. OUR MB INTERLOCUTORS STRESS THAT THE ORGANIZATION WANTS TO REFORM EGYPT'S CURRENT SYSTEM (TERMED SOMEWHAT CORRUPT AND INCOMPLETELY ISLAMIC) GRADUALLY BY WORKING THROUGH GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY. THEY SAY AN MB GOVERNMENT WOULD WILLINGLY CEDE POWER IF, ONCE ELECTED TO OFFICE, IT WERE SUBSEQUENTLY TO LOSE AN ELECTION. IN FACT, MB SHURA COUNCIL MEMBER (AND JOURNALIST SYNDICATE BOARD MEMBER) SALAH ABDEL MAQSUD TOLD US THAT THE MB PREFERS NOT TO BE IN POWER, BUT INSTEAD SEEKS TO INFLUENCE THE GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT COMPLETELY ISLAMIC POLICIES. HE CITES MB FOUNDER HASAN AL-BANNA WHO REPORTEDLY SAID, WHEN ASKED, THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO BE PRESIDENT OF EGYPT, HE JUST WANTED THE PRESIDENT TO IMPLEMENT AN ISLAMIC PROGRAM. WE RECENTLY OBSERVED AN MB PRESENTATION TO A SECULAR EGYPTIAN AUDIENCE, DURING A REGULAR WEEKLY GATHERING HOSTED BY A LOCAL NGO. THE SPEAKER CAREFULLY PITCHED A NATIONALISTIC RATHER THAN RELIGIOUS APPEAL, STRESSING THAT EGYPT'S ACHIEVEMENTS, WHETHER IN THE ECONOMY OR FOREIGN POLICY OR BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE, ARE ACHIEVEMENTS FOR ISLAM, SINCE EGYPT IS AN ISLAMIC COUNTRY. WE ARE FOR EVERYTHING THAT MAKES EGYPT STRONG, HE CONCLUDED.

17. (C) ON THE OTHER HAND, EXAMINATION OF SPECIFIC MB PRACTICES AND POLICIES BELIES THIS STATED COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC NORMS. AS THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATE, DEMOCRACY IS FINE AS LONG AS IT IS CONSISTENT WITH GOD'S LAW, BUT GOD'S LAW AS INTERPRETED BY THE MB TRUMPS ALL.

-- FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: MB SPOKESMAN HODEIBY AND OTHER MB FIGURES WERE IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE 1995 CAMPAIGN TO DECLARE CAIRO UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR NASR ABU ZEID AN "APOSTATE" FOR HIS WRITINGS ON MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF ISLAM. IN ADDITION, MB MEMBERS IN THE PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES FAVOR SYNDICATE DISCIPLINARY EFFORTS (E.G. STRIPPING OF PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS) FOR MEMBERS WHO ADVOCATE GREATER CONTACTS WITH ISRAELIS. THE MB'S PROFESSED INTEREST IN FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION REMAINS LIMITED TO ITS ABILITY TO FURTHER ITS OWN IDEOLOGY.

-- WOMEN'S RIGHTS: WOMEN CAN IN THEORY VOTE IN THE MB SHURA ELECTIONS AND STAND FOR ELECTION. IN PRACTICE, ACCORDING TO MB SOURCES, WOMEN HAVE NEVER PARTICIPATED IN EITHER THE SHURA OR GUIDANCE OFFICE (WE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT IN THE YEMEN AND JORDAN MB, A FEW WOMEN HAVE JOINED THE NATIONAL-LEVEL SHURA COUNCILS.) THE ONLY EVEN SEMI-PROMINENT MB WOMAN RECALLED BY OUR INTERLOCUTORS IN EGYPT IS ZEINAB AL-GHAZZALI (DAUGHTER OF THE LATE MB SHEIKH MUHAMMAD AL-GHAZZALI). SHE HOLDS NO OFFICIAL POSITION IN THE MB.

--ATTITUDE TOWARDS ISRAEL: DESPITE ITS STATED ADHERENCE TO NON-VIOLENT SOLUTIONS, THE MB HAS NOT ACCEPTED THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT'S PEACE TREATY WITH ISRAEL. IT CALLS FOR ARMED STRUGGLE TO LIBERATE JERUSALEM AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. ITS PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THIS ISSUE HAVE INCREASINGLY CRITICIZED THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY AND SUPPORTED HAMAS. FOR INSTANCE, THE MB STATEMENT AFTER THE WYE RIVER AGREEMENT (AS PUBLISHED IN THE OPPOSITION AL-SHAAB NEWSPAPER OF OCTOBER 27) CONDEMNED THE PA'S ARRESTS OF ISLAMISTS IN GAZA AND CALLED THE PA "A TOOL FOR SUPPRESSING THE PALESTINIANS, WHICH MAY LEAD TO CIVIL WAR." INSIDE EGYPT, THE MB STRONGLY REJECTS ANY NORMALIZATION WITH ISRAELIS AS NOTED ABOVE. LEADER OF THE MB SPLINTER WASAT GROUP ABUL ELA AL-MADI TOLD US "NORMALIZATION" SHOULD MEAN NO ISRAEL SINCE ELIMINATION OF THAT "ARTIFICIAL ENTITY" WOULD BE FOR HIM THE "NORMAL" CONDITION.

-- POSITION OF MINORITIES: THE MOST FAMOUS LIVING MB SCHOLAR IS YUSUF AL-QARDAWI, AN EGYPTIAN NOW LIVING IN QATAR, CONSIDERED BY SOME WESTERN SCHOLARS TO BE A MODERATE IN THE FUNDAMENTALIST SPECTRUM. NEVERTHELESS, THE QARDAWI WHOSE BOOKS AND TAPED LECTURES WE FIND IN CAIRO IS NO MODERATE. FOR INSTANCE, HE SUPPORTS RE-IMPOSING THE TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC TAX ON NON-MUSLIMS LIVING IN AN ISLAMIC COUNTRY (CALLED THE "JIZYA" TAX). HIS BOOK "NON-MUSLIMS IN ISLAMIC COUNTRIES" COMMENTS CRITICALLY ON THE EMPHASIS PLACED BY SOME ARAB GOVERNMENTS (READ THE GOE) ON INTERFAITH TOLERANCE, MISPLACED IN QARDAWI'S EYES TO THE EXTENT THAT IT CONFLICTS WITH GOD'S LAW. QARDAWI WRITES: "IT IS NOT TOLERANCE TO FORCE MUSLIMS TO ABANDON GOD'S LAW FOR THE SAKE OF SPARING THE FEELINGS OF NON-MUSLIM MINORITIES. WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY A CHRISTIAN OR JEW SHOULD BE OFFENDED BY THE AMPUTATION OF A THIEF'S HAND, OR THE FLOGGING OF SLANDERERS, ADULTERERS OR DRUNKS... A MUSLIM OBEYS THESE RULES AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP, WHILE A NON-MUSLIM, WHO DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THEIR DIVINE NATURE, SHOULD TAKE THEM TO BE MERELY THE CRIMINAL LAW OF THE LAND ADOPTED BY THE MAJORITY." SUPREME GUIDE MASHOUR, IN A 1997 AL-AHRAM INTERVIEW, LIKewise SUPPORTED IMPOSING THE JIZYA TAX ON EGYPT'S COPTIC MINORITY (THOUGH HE LATER DENIED MAKING THE REMARKS).

PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES - THE LOST MB STRONGHOLDS STAY QUIET

18. (C) SOME EGYPTIAN OBSERVERS OF THE MB AGREE THAT WHILE ITS PRACTICES ARE NOT DEMOCRATIC, THE MB'S YOUNGER GENERATION MAY OVER TIME GAIN POLITICAL EXPERIENCE AND EVOLVE AWAY FROM THEOCRATIC THEORY TOWARDS A MORE PRACTICAL ACCEPTANCE OF POLITICS IN A SECULAR STATE (ALONG THE LINES, SAY THESE OBSERVERS, OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTIES IN WESTERN EUROPE). IN SUPPORT OF THIS ARGUMENT, THESE OBSERVERS POINT PARTICULARLY TO THE MB'S EXPERIENCE OF RUNNING SEVERAL OF EGYPT'S PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES FROM 1992-95. THEY CITE THIS AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE MB'S POTENTIAL DEMOCRATIC TENDENCIES AND ACTUAL COALITION BUILDING ABILITIES. PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES HAVE BEEN AN IMPORTANT NON-GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTION IN EGYPTIAN PUBLIC LIFE SINCE THE 1920'S. WHILE THEIR TRADITIONAL FOCUS WAS ON REGULATING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND PROVIDING MEMBER SERVICES, THE SYNDICATES HAVE ALWAYS

BEEN A FORUM TO DISCUSS POLITICAL ISSUES. IN NASSER'S ERA THEY WERE USED POLITICALLY TO RALLY "POPULAR" SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMS. UNDER SADAT, THEY WERE A REFUGE FOR LEFTIST CRITICS OF THE REGIME. IN ADDITION, THE SYNDICATES ARE OFTEN A STEPPING STONE TO A POLITICAL CAREER FOR GOVERNMENT-APPROVED CANDIDATES (E.G., FORMER PRIME MINISTER MUSTAFA KHALIL ROSE UP THROUGH THE ENGINEERS SYNDICATE).

19. (C) IN THE LATE 1980'S AND EARLY 1990'S THE MB USED ITS ORGANIZATIONAL AND FINANCIAL ABILITIES TO GET OUT ITS VOTE IN SYNDICATE BOARD ELECTIONS. SINCE SYNDICATE MEMBERS MUST CAST BALLOTS EITHER IN CAIRO SYNDICATE HEADQUARTERS, OR IN CAPITALS OF REGIONAL PROVINCES, THE MB BUSSED IN THEIR SYNDICATE MEMBERS AND OTHER SYMPATHIZERS FROM THE PROVINCES ON ELECTION DAY. SYNDICATE MEMBERS MUST PAY DUES, AND ANOTHER MB TECHNIQUE OF THE TIME WAS TO AGREE TO PAY A MEMBER'S DUES IN EXCHANGE FOR A PRO-MB VOTE IN THE SYNDICATE ELECTIONS. THE RESULT: THE MB CAPTURED PLURALITIES OF THE GOVERNING BOARDS OF THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS SYNDICATES - THE LAWYERS, ENGINEERS, DOCTORS, AND PHARMACISTS. THE MB CONTROLLED THE SYNDICATES BY SUPPORTING A NEUTRAL OR PRO-GOVERNMENT CANDIDATE FOR THE TOP POSITION, WHILE KEEPING THE DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT POSITIONS AND RUNNING THE SYNDICATES THROUGH COALITIONS WITH OTHER OPPOSITION AND INDEPENDENT FIGURES.

110. (C) AFTER THE MB GAINED CONTROL OF THE SYNDICATES, THE GOE RESPONDED FIRST BY CHANGING THE SYNDICATE ELECTION LAWS IN 1992 TO REQUIRE SUPER MAJORITIES, AND THEN IN LATE 1995 BY ABOLISHING THE MB-RUN BOARDS OF SEVERAL SYNDICATES AND REPLACING THEM WITH GOE-APPOINTED GUARDIANS. THE GUARDIANS ARE SUPPOSED TO TEMPORARILY LOOK AFTER SYNDICATE AFFAIRS AND PREPARE FOR NEW ELECTIONS. IN JUSTIFYING THESE MOVES, THE GOE MADE TWO CLAIMS: THE MB EMBEZZLED SYNDICATE FUNDS, AND THE MB WAS USING THE SYNDICATES TO PROMOTE THEIR OWN POLITICAL AGENDA. AHMAD SEIF AL-ISLAM HASSAN AL-BANNA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE LAWYERS SYNDICATE DURING THE PERIOD OF MB CONTROL (AND SON OF THE MB FOUNDER), ADMITTED TO US THERE WERE SOME FINANCIAL ERRORS MADE DURING THE MB TENURE, BUT HE VEHEMENTLY DENIED THAT THIS JUSTIFIED THE GOE SHUTTING DOWN THE INDEPENDENT SYNDICATES. THE ONLY FINANCIAL DETAILS CITED TO US IN MEETINGS WITH SYNDICATE MEMBERS ARE THAT SOME SYNDICATE CONTRACTS (PRINTING LEAFLETS OR ARRANGING SYNDICATE MEMBER TRAVEL) WERE GIVEN TO COMPANIES OWNED BY MB MEMBERS. THE MORE SERIOUS CHARGE IS THAT THE SYNDICATES BECAME MB POLITICAL PLATFORMS. AS NOTED ABOVE, SYNDICATES HAVE ALWAYS HAD A POLITICAL VOICE, BUT THIS VOICE APPARENTLY BECAME INTOLERABLY ANTI-REGIME DURING THE PERIOD OF MB CONTROL. HAMDI SAYYID, CURRENT PRESIDENT OF THE DOCTORS SYNDICATE AND RULING PARTY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, DETAILED FOR US HOW POLITICS (E.G., BOSNIA OR THE GOE COUNTER-TERROR CAMPAIGN) BECAME THE DOCTORS' OVERRIDING ISSUES DURING THE MB TENURE, TO THE NEGLECT OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND MEMBER SERVICES.

111. (C) SINCE 1995, THE SYNDICATES HAVE GROWN QUIET, HOLDING ONLY THE OCCASIONAL SMALL-SCALE PROTESTS OF U.S. POLICY DURING IRAQ CRISES. THE TWO MOST POLITICALLY VOCAL DURING THE MB TENURE - THE LAWYERS AND ENGINEERS - REMAIN UNDER GOE GUARDIANSHIP, WITH NO DATES YET FOR NEW BOARD ELECTIONS. SPECULATION ON IMMINENT LAWYERS SYNDICATE ELECTIONS HAS CIRCULATED IN THE PRESS AND AMONG LAWYERS FOR MONTHS. THE GOVERNMENTAL FRONT-RUNNER, RAGA'I ATIYAH (MUBARAK FAMILY PERSONAL LAWYER), IS RUMORED TO HAVE FORMED A COALITION WITH THE MB LAWYERS WHEREBY THEY WILL SUPPORT HIM FOR PRESIDENT IN EXCHANGE FOR THE GOE'S ALLOWING THE MB A CERTAIN SPECIFIED NUMBER OF SEATS ON THE BOARD. WAFD PARTY COMPETITORS TOLD US THIS RUMORED COALITION FELL APART WHEN, AT A RECENT JOINT MEETING OF THE ATIYAH BACKERS AND MB LAWYERS, IT BECAME CLEAR TO THE GOE SECURITY SERVICES THAT THE MB WOULD DOMINATE THIS COALITION. THE LATEST WORD IS THAT LAWYERS

SYNDICATE ELECTIONS MUST WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE OCTOBER 1999 REFERENDUM ON MUBARAK'S FOURTH TERM.

THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: QUIET ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

¶12. (U) IN 1995, WHILE THE GOVERNMENT WAS SHUTTING DOWN THE MB-CONTROLLED SYNDICATES, IT ALSO ARRESTED SEVERAL HUNDRED MB MEMBERS FROM SYNDICATES AND UNIVERSITIES, BUNDLING 82 OF THEM THROUGH EXPEDITED TRIALS IN THE MILITARY COURT SYSTEM. THE MAIN CHARGES WERE BELONGING TO A BANNED GROUP (THE MB IS NOT A LEGAL ENTITY IN EGYPT) AND WORKING AGAINST THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT. IN ADDITION, THE GOVERNMENT CHARGED MANY WITH CONTACTS WITH "JIHAD" AND "ISLAMIC GROUP" TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS (THUS FURTHER JUSTIFYING THE RESORT TO THE MILITARY COURTS ON NATIONAL SECURITY GROUNDS). IN THE FIRST OF TWO TRIALS IN NOVEMBER 1995, 31 MB MEMBERS WERE SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS IN PRISON, THREE OTHERS WERE SENTENCED TO FIVE YEARS AND 15 WERE ACQUITTED (CASE NO. 95/8). IN THE OTHER CASE, 17 WERE SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS IN PRISON AND THREE MORE TO FIVE YEARS, WITH 13 ACQUITTALS (CASE NO. 95/11).

¶13. (U) A NEW GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN OF MB ARRESTS BEGAN SEVEN MONTHS AGO, WITH A TOTAL OF 110 SUSPECTED MB MEMBERS ARRESTED TO DATE, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS. THOSE ARRESTED ARE BEING HELD IN DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL, WHICH IS ALLOWED FOR PERIODS OF UP TO SIX MONTHS UNDER THE POST-1981 EMERGENCY LAWS (THOUGH IN PRACTICE SUCH DETENTION CAN OCCUR FOR YEARS). THE CAMPAIGN IS NATION-WIDE THOUGH FOCUSED ON MB CENTERS IN THE DELTA, CAIRO AND ALEXANDRIA: IN THE DELTA PROVINCE OF KAFR AL-SHEIKH, 16 PERSONS WERE ARRESTED BETWEEN AUGUST AND OCTOBER (ALL BUT ONE WERE RECENTLY RELEASED); IN ALEXANDRIA, 11 WERE ARRESTED IN OCTOBER AND ANOTHER NINE IN FEBRUARY; IN GIZA, FIVE WERE ARRESTED IN FEBRUARY. THE EGYPTIAN ORGANIZATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (EOHR) HAS COMPILED DATA ON THESE RECENT ARRESTEES, GATHERING TESTIMONY AND ALLEGING INCIDENTS OF TORTURE AND MALTREATMENT BY THE STATE SECURITY FORCES DURING THE INTERROGATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE GOE HAS RELEASED ALL OF THE 48 MB MEMBERS SENTENCED IN NOVEMBER 1995 TO THREE-YEAR PRISON TERMS.

¶14. (U) THE EOHR REPORT PROVIDES NAMES, AGES, AND OCCUPATIONS OF THE RECENT ARRESTEES. THE CONSISTENT PATTERN IS MIDDLE-INCOME MEN BETWEEN 30 TO 45 YEARS OF AGE (PROFESSIONALS, HIGHER SALARIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, MERCHANTS). THUS FAR, WE HAVE SPOTTED AMONG THE NEW ARRESTEES ONLY TWO FROM THE GROUP CONVICTED IN 1995 AND RELEASED IN 1998. THEY ARE PROMINENT MB ACTIVISTS IBRAHIM AL-ZAAFARANI (SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ALEXANDRIA CHAPTER OF THE DOCTORS SYNDICATE) AND MUHAMMAD TAHA WAHDAN (PROFESSOR OF COMMERCE AT ISMAILIYYA UNIVERSITY). ZAAFARANI HAS BEEN RE-ARRESTED AND RELEASED FROM DETENTION SEVERAL TIMES SINCE HIS THREE-YEAR PRISON TERM ENDED IN JANUARY 1998.

¶15. (C) OBSERVERS HERE INTERPRET THESE ARRESTS AS THE GOE'S ONGOING EFFORTS TO DETER MB ACTIVISM PRIOR TO UPCOMING ELECTIONS. THE LAST MAJOR ROUND-UP IN 1995 PRECEDED THE NOVEMBER 1995 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS; A MUCH SMALLER NUMBER OF MB ARRESTS PRECEDED EACH OF THE 1997 LOCAL COUNCIL AND 1998 SHURA COUNCIL ELECTIONS. WE MAY NOW BE WITNESSING GOE PREVENTIVE EFFORTS PRIOR TO THE OCTOBER 1999 PRESIDENTIAL REFERENDUM AND PROSPECTIVE SYNDICATE ELECTIONS. SOME OBSERVERS EXPECT THE GOE TO KEEP UP THIS PRESSURE THROUGH THE NOVEMBER 2000 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. THE MESSAGE FROM THE GOE TO THE MB IS: WE WILL NOT LET YOU RE-BUILD, EVEN IF YOU ARE KEEPING QUIET. THE GOVERNMENT ENSURES THAT ITS MESSAGE IS WELL DISSEMINATED BY INFORMING THE PRESS OF THESE ARRESTS.

INTERNAL DIVISIONS ADD TO THEIR PROBLEMS

16.(C) THE GOE ARREST CAMPAIGNS UNIFORMLY TARGET THE MID-RANGE CADRE OF THE MB, LEAVING THE SEPTUAGENARIANS IN THE LEADERSHIP UNTOUCHED. DIFFERENCES HAVE EMERGED BETWEEN THESE NOW-LATE 30 SOMETHING ACTIVISTS (WHO LED THE SYNDICATE TAKEOVERS IN THE EARLY 1990'S) AND THE OLD GUARD LEADERSHIP OVER ISSUES OF INTERNAL MANAGEMENT AND POLICY. WE HEARD FROM EGYPTIAN OBSERVERS THAT SPOKESMAN HODEIBY FILLED SEVERAL VACANT POSITIONS IN THE GUIDANCE BUREAU WITHOUT CONVENING A SHURA COUNCIL MEETING, AS THE MB RULES STIPULATE. ACCORDING TO THESE OBSERVERS, THE YOUNGER GENERATION ALSO HOLDS MASHOUR AND HODEIBY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WASAT GROUP'S DEFECTION. IN 1996, ABOUT 70 YOUNGER MB ACTIVISTS LEFT TO FORM THEIR OWN POLITICAL PARTY, CALLED THE WASAT OR CENTER PARTY, AFTER MASHOUR REFUSED TO APPROVE THEIR PARTY (REFTEL). MANY OF THE ORIGINAL WASAT GROUP HAS RETURNED TO THE MB BUT, ACCORDING TO MB OBSERVERS, THEY CONTINUE TO FEEL LEFT OUT OF POLICY DECISION-MAKING. FINALLY, AT LEAST ONE OBSERVER (DIA RASHWAN OF THE AL-AHRAM CENTER) SEES A GROWING RIFT BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN MB AND THE BRANCH ORGANIZATIONS IN OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES, ACCENTUATED BY THE SECURITY PRESSURES FELT BY THE EGYPTIAN MB. THE ORGANIZATIONS IN JORDAN, YEMEN AND ALGERIA ARE RELATIVELY VIBRANT COMPARED TO THE EGYPTIAN GROUP, AND SEEM LESS INCLINED TO FOLLOW EGYPTIAN HOME OFFICE GUIDANCE. FINALLY, OUR MB SOURCES SOMEWHAT PARADOXICALLY DO NOT SPEAK WELL OF THE ONLY ISLAMIST GOVERNMENT IN THE ARAB WORLD - SUDAN - SINCE TURABI'S NATIONAL ISLAMIC FRONT SEES ITSELF AS A COMPETITOR TO THE MB, SEEKING TO ABSORB SUDAN'S MB INTO ITS OWN "FRONT."

COMMENT

17. (C) CONDITIONS ARE DIFFICULT FOR THE MB AT PRESENT. THE GOE'S DETERMINED OPPOSITION AND USE OF SECURITY SERVICES AND EMERGENCY LAWS KEEPS THE PRESSURE ON. THE EGYPTIAN PUBLIC, AS AN EXHAUSTING BOUT OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM WINDS DOWN, SEEMS LESS INTERESTED NOW THAN IT WAS A DECADE AGO IN AN ISLAMIST MESSAGE, EVEN THE MB'S SOFT-SELL APPROACH. NEVERTHELESS, THE MB RETAINS A NATION-WIDE ORGANIZATION WITH ROOTS IN THE GROWING RANKS OF URBAN PROFESSIONALS, AND IN THE SUEZ CANAL CITIES (WHERE IT STARTED), ALEXANDRIA AND PARTS OF THE DELTA. THE MB TAKES A FAMOUSLY LONG VIEW OF ITS PROSPECTS, AND IT WILL REMAIN THE LARGEST AND BEST ORGANIZED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT IN EGYPT.

NOTE ON SOURCES

18. (C) THE MB IS A BANNED GROUP IN EGYPT. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT USED TO TOLERATE A MORE OPEN MB PRESENCE (E.G., THE MB IN 1987 OPENLY JOINED AN OPPOSITION COALITION FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS), SINCE 1995 IT HAS STRICTLY ENFORCED THE BAN. GIVEN THESE HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITIES, EMBASSY CONTACT WITH THE MB FOCUSES ON INFLUENTIAL MB MEMBERS WHO ARE ALSO ACTIVE IN THE PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES. WE CALL ON THEM IN THEIR CAPACITIES AS SYNDICATE LEADERS, NOT AS MEMBERS OF A BANNED GROUP. OUR CURRENT MB CONTACTS ARE MUHAMMAD ABDEL QUDUS AND SALAH ABDEL MAQSUD (BOTH ON THE BOARD OF THE JOURNALISTS SYNDICATE), AHMAD SEIF AL-ISLAM HASAN AL-BANNA (FORMERLY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE LAWYERS SYNDICATE, AN ACTIVE LAWYER), AND ABUL ELA AL-MADI (FOUNDER OF THE MB SPLINTER WASAT PARTY, FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ENGINEERS SYNDICATE). WE ALSO CONTACT OTHER EGYPTIAN OBSERVERS OF THE MB SCENE. THEY ARE DIA RASHWAN AND HALA MUSTAFA OF THE AL-AHRAM CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, MUHAMMAD SALAH OF AL-HAYAT NEWSPAPER, KHALED DAWOUD OF AL-AHRAM NEWSPAPER, RIFAAT SAID, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE TAGAMMU' PARTY, MAHMOUD ABAZA AND MUHAMMAD KAMIL OF

THE OPPOSITION WAFD PARTY, AND KAMAL ABUL MAGD, FORMER
MB MEMBER AND INTERNATIONAL LAWYER.

KURTZER